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ABSTRACT

Focusing on minority group children, ages 2 to 4 years, and their mothers, the Netherlands' Samenspel project is intended to be a link between the home environment and the preschool or primary school. Mothers and children go to playgroups once a week, most of which are held in a community center or preschool. This summary report describes a study from September 1994 to June 1995 of mothers' experiences with Samenspel. Thirty-five mothers were interviewed, most of whom do not have a Dutch background, and their experiences and thoughts formed the focus of the study. After describing Samenspel's background and objectives, this report presents reasons for the study, its objectives, and the process of decisions about problem formulation and methodology. The bulk of the report presents results from the study. Findings include the following: (1) the most significant motivation for participating in Samenspel is enabling children to meet other children; (2) mothers especially appreciate activities that they do together with their children; (3) the presence of play leaders who speak the mothers' own language as well as those who speak Dutch is considered important for learning and speaking languages; (4) meeting other women at Samenspel has been a positive experience; (5) the opportunity to discuss child-rearing with other women is appreciated; (6) mothers believe Samenspel is good for their child's, and often their own, language development; (7) mothers are dealing with their children's socio-emotional development with more awareness; (8) positive changes in the children's and mothers' independence are occurring; and (9) the majority of participants are satisfied with Samenspel. (EV)

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Working Papers in
Early Childhood Development

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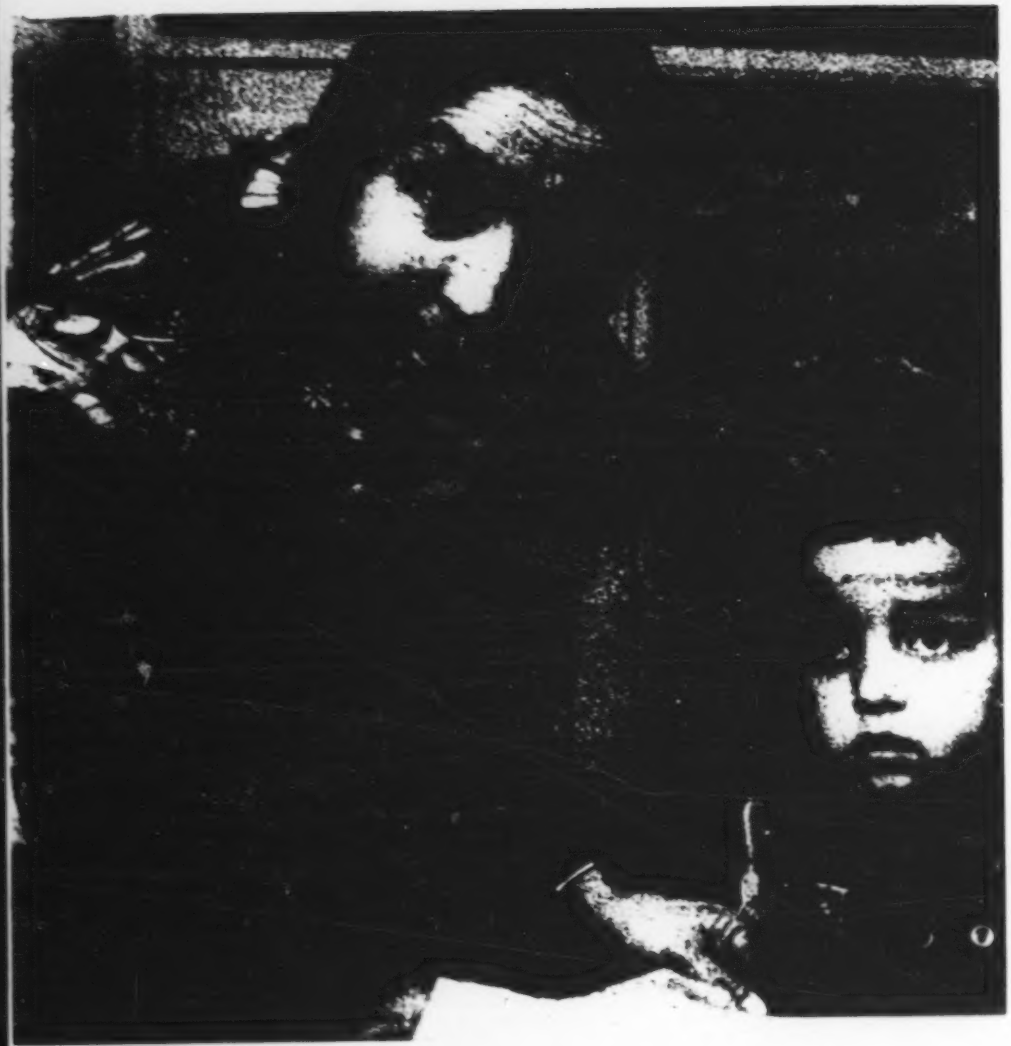

Nanette Kieneker and Judith Maas
on behalf of
Samenspel op Maat

Samenspel – Mothers Speaking

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About this paper

Mothers speaking – a study on the experience of mothers with Samenspel was originally published as *Moeders aan het woord: een onderzoek naar de ervaringen van moeders met Samenspel.* It describes the results of a study, conducted by Nanette Kieneker and Judith Maas, students of Education at the University of Amsterdam, for the *Samenspel* project, on the experiences of mothers with *Samenspel*. It is of interest to play leaders, leaders of pre-schools, playgroups, and child care centres; and others working with parents and young children.

The findings show that mothers pick up a great deal from playgroups, and try to apply this knowledge in their daily lives and in the rearing of their children. They are thought-provoking for institutions and local and national governments, and can form a foundation for establishing and supporting playgroups for specific groups.

The *Samenspel* project, started in 1989, was supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. It now operates under the auspices of *Samenspel op Maat*.

With thanks to:
The mothers who cooperated in the interviews and in the pre-test; the *Samenspel* play leaders who helped recruit the mothers and acted as interpreters during the interviews; Roel Copier, Rob van der Wal, and Mathil van Drongelen from *Samenspel* for their support, practical help and advice; Hendrik Jan Wansink for the visualisation of the research data; the employees of the community centres.

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About *Stichting Samenspel op Maat*

This paper exemplifies the *Samenspel* approach: the central position of children and their parents, and those who work directly with them. This approach has resulted in a project that is effective, flexible and rooted in reality, which works with the everyday questions, needs and problems of parents and children. It recognises the importance of on-the-job support for play leaders and the sharing of practical experiences; it assumes that play leaders and mothers work together to find solutions and in children's best interest.

At the time of the research (1994), *Samenspel*'s activities were concentrated in Rotterdam. It subsequently became clear that many organisations all over the Netherlands were either working with *Samenspel* approaches or with its related programmes; the need for *Samenspel* to widen its scope was felt. As a result a new organisation, *Stichting Samenspel op Maat*, was set up in 1997 to disseminate and implement the *Samenspel* approach nationally. In accordance with its guiding principles, the play leaders and parents – *Samenspel's* 'ambassadors' – will play a key role.

Apart from this national network, *Stichting Samenspel op Maat* values continuing and strengthening its international network of European organisations in the countries of origin of its target groups.

This publication forms an integral part of a range of activities which are connected to the Bernard van Leer Foundation's exploration of the theme 'culturally appropriate approaches in early childhood development'. The Foundation invites responses to this paper, and contributions to the theme and to the Working Paper series. For information on other publications and activities on this and other themes, please write to the Department of Programme Documentation and Communication at the address on the back cover.

Working Papers in
Early Childhood Development

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Nanette Kieneker and Judith Maas
on behalf of
Samenspel op Maat

Samenspel – Mothers Speaking: A study on the experience of mothers with *Samenspel*

Bernard van Leer Foundation, *September 1997*

PREFACE

The goal of the *Samenspel* project is to involve mothers of non-Dutch origin and their young children in pre-school. Through its playgroups, the project hopes to encourage these mothers and children to participate in Dutch society to a greater degree.

The *Samenspel* project thought it would be a good idea to invite external and independent researchers to evaluate its activities. The study which followed focused on one of the first and most important links in the desired process of change: whether participation in *Samenspel* held the same meaning for the mothers as the project had originally intended.

I was happy to learn that the mothers do experience the intended effects of *Samenspel*. This report gives a clear and concrete description of the manner in which the effects are experienced. Also, the results of the study seem to indicate that the mothers appreciated the opportunity to offer their opinion and, in this way, contribute to further improvements in the project.

This study is a fine demonstration of the value that research can have for the target group of an early childhood development (ECD) project as well as for the implementers of that project.

Professor Jo Hermanns
Professor of Education
University of Amsterdam

INTRODUCTION

Nanette Kieneker and Judith Maas, students at the University of Amsterdam, conducted a study on the experience of mothers with *Samenspel* from September 1994 until June 1995. The study resulted from a question posed by *Samenspel*: whether the sought after effects of the programme were also being experienced by the mothers. Professor Jo Hermanns was responsible for the study which took place under the guidance of Ied Guinée PhD, both of the University of Amsterdam.

Thirty-five mothers were interviewed, most of whom do not have a Dutch cultural background. Their experiences and thoughts form the focus of the study. Portraits of three of the mothers – prepared by Japke Schonewille – bring a human face to the facts and figures.

The researchers presented their official report, *Moeders aan het woord: een onderzoek naar de ervaringen van moeders met Samenspel* – 'Mothers Speaking: a study on the experience of mothers with *Samenspel*', at a national, practical conference which *Samenspel* organised in June 1995.

This paper is adaptated from the research report, and provides a summary of the results.[1] For *Samenspel* playgroup leaders, the findings will often confirm what they have already experienced in practice; namely, that the mothers pick up a great deal from the playgroups, and try to apply this in their daily lives and in the rearing of their children. The findings can provide a starting point for discussions around the intentions and effects of *Samenspel*.

Play leaders in pre-schools and child care centres may be interested in learning about *Samenspel's* target groups and methodology. Certain approaches can be incorporated into their work, such as involving mothers (and fathers) more, or by more adequately meeting the need for information. This also applies to other professionals working in the fields of educational support.[2]

1 Those interested in the complete research report – which is in Dutch – can contact *Stichting Samenspel Op Maat* at the address on the inside cover

2 The words 'educational support' have been translated from the Dutch *opvoedings-ondersteuning* which has a wider meaning that encompasses parenting, child development, child care and child rearing, and support of parents and families

SAMENSPEL – MOTHERS SPEAKING: A STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERS WITH *SAMENSPEL*

The Samenspel project – Background

Samenspel was founded in 1989 with the financial support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The project began with six playgroups in a number of Rotterdam neighbourhoods. The development phase of the project was concluded in 1992 and the second phase concluded at the end of 1996. The emphasis of the latter was on the dissemination of the project results in Rotterdam, incorporating the approach into pre-schools, and upon the further development of the playgroups.

By September 1995, there were 15 *Samenspel* locations in Rotterdam, and 13 other locations (mostly primary schools) had definite plans to start a *Samenspel* programme. The programme is also being used – in different ways – elsewhere in the Netherlands.

What is Samenspel?

The *Samenspel* project revolves around playgroups. Focusing on children aged two to four years and their mothers, these playgroups are intended to be a link between the home environment and the pre-school or primary school. The mothers and children come once a week to the playgroups, which are mostly held in a community centre or pre-school.

At the time of the study, families of Turkish, Moroccan and Antillean background have been primarily chosen as the project's target group. These families tend to make little use of regular pre-schools. The children often have developmental delays, which become apparent when they begin primary school.

During the playgroups, the participants' own language becomes the working language. The playgroup leaders consist of one who speaks the participants' language and one who speaks Dutch.

The play leaders engage the children in a wide range of activities that are closely related to the typical workings of a pre-school. The mothers play a central role in this. They participate in the activities and, in addition, receive information on child-rearing and child development. The basic assumption is that the mothers are experts in the area of raising their children; it is up to them to choose what they find valuable and useful.

Samenspel believes that the experiences of the mothers in the playgroups constitute a positive influence on child-rearing in the family. *Samenspel* also believes that the activities have a positive impact on both the development of the children and their preparation for primary education. Finally, it is expected that those children who participate in *Samenspel* will be brought sooner to pre-school.

Three main objectives of Samenspel

- To stimulate the use of pre-schools by families with children who do not yet attend such facilities.
- To stimulate the development of young children to improve their chances in the primary education system.
- To offer educational support to mothers. Through the exchange of experiences with other mothers and through participation in *Samenspel* activities, mothers experience new things and acquire new knowledge. Their coping skills are broadened in this way.

Reasons for the study

Those working with the *Samenspel* project wanted to know if the intended effects of the programme were indeed being experienced by the participants. To answer this question, the assistance of Professor Jo Hermanns, Professor of Education at the University of Amsterdam, was requested. This initial contact resulted in the research focusing on the experiences of the mothers participating in the *Samenspel* project. Two students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences were interested in the focus of the study. They saw it as a unique and challenging opportunity – conducting a qualitative study looking at a group that is frequently described as 'difficult to reach'.

Objectives of the study

- To obtain insight into the changes that mothers experience through participation in *Samenspel* and to identify the nature of these changes.

- To compare the changes hypothesised by *Samenspel* with the changes indicated by the mothers.

- To adjust the programme, where necessary, to foster a better affinity with, and provide better support to, the target group.

- To use the research results, where appropriate, as a support in contacting policy makers and other institutions.

- To use the research results to evaluate and conclude the project in the future.

Portrait of Sariye Topcu:

***Samenspel* mother from day one**

Hillesluis, an old Rotterdam neighbourhood. Many streets with dilapidated houses and even some that have been sealed off. Occasional glimpses of municipal renovation can also be seen. Like in the street where Sariye Topcu lives, where trees grow along the sides of the road and children play with marbles in a small square. We ring the bell at a newly built, low-rise block of flats. Sariye opens the door. Her three year old son Samed stares at us with curiosity from behind his mother's skirt. Then he recognises Sefa Cetin, the play leader from *Samenspel*, laughs shyly and returns her greeting in Turkish. We settle ourselves in the living room for the interview.

At first Samed constantly tries to capture the attention of his mother. She responds lovingly, giving him a cuddle and getting him one of his toys from the closet, but keeps her attention focused on the interview. There are plates of home-made cookies, little pizzas and other delicacies which Sariye has put out for us, and Samed is allowed to snack on them too. After a while, he's had enough of all the talking and goes to play in the hall. A bit later we hear him rummaging around in the kitchen. Sariye tells us beaming: *'He's doing the dishes – he likes that!'*

Sariye Topcu has been a *Samenspel* mother from day one. Her oldest son, Mustafa, who's now seven and is at primary school, also went to the playgroups. Sariye had first taken him to a pre-school, but Mustafa missed her terribly and wouldn't stop crying. She couldn't bear that and took him home again. Then, in the neighbourhood paper, she read about *Samenspel*, a perfect intermediate solution: Mustafa could play with other children, he could ride a bike – his most favourite thing to do – and his mother could stay nearby. When he went off to primary school for the first time, the drama repeated itself. But Sariye knew that he had to adjust. Now he's doing just great.

Allowing for time to get used to a new situation is something that Sariye knows about from her own life. As a 14 year old girl, she moved with her mother and three brothers from Karaman in Turkey to Bergen-op-Zoom in the Netherlands in 1977. Her father had already lived in the Netherlands for more than 12 years. Sariye hardly knew him, only from his holidays in Turkey.

Sariye hated her first year in the Netherlands: *'I didn't know anybody and I didn't speak a single word of Dutch. I felt so alone. I didn't have any sisters and I hadn't yet made any girl friends. My parents wanted me to go to school, but I wanted to stay home as it was only there that I felt comfortable. Luckily, a girl friend of mine from Turkey came to live in Utrecht. Now and then I'd go to see her. Then I felt less lonely.'* Later, Sariye met people at a vocational training centre. Gradually she settled into life in the Netherlands.

At the vocational centre, Sariye learned Dutch, and took typing and sewing lessons, but it wasn't enough to be considered as a professional training; she had learned a great deal in a few years, but she still wasn't prepared for a profession. Sariye lived at home with her parents for the next few years, helping out with the housework and embroidering, sewing and crocheting for her trousseau. She borrowed books from the library to improve her Dutch, and she'd go over to a girlfriend's for a bit of a chat. Sometimes they'd go to the movies on Sunday, if a good Turkish film was playing: *'I loved romantic films or films with a lot of drama and tears. Preferably with a good ending, otherwise I'd cry even more. I thought they were wonderful. I don't cry at those kinds of films anymore,'* says Sariye, laughing.

continued on next page

In 1987 there was again a big change on the horizon, when her parents decided to return to Turkey. Sariye couldn't imagine this. She felt at home in Holland, had found a nice circle of friends, and she didn't want to start all over again. But staying behind alone was impossible. The only solution was marriage. How did she get to know her husband? Sariye: *'Our neighbours knew that I wanted to stay in Holland so they introduced me to my husband-to-be. We met each other twice, it clicked, and we decided to get married. It all happened within two months. Of course we didn't really know each other yet, but I had the feeling that it was going to work.'* She plays with the purple and red scarf covering her head: *'At first my parents were against our marriage. I was raised in a liberal family while my husband was raised traditionally and is strict about keeping to the Islamic rules. My parents thought that it couldn't work out. And there were tensions in the beginning. I had to adjust, for example, I had to wear a head scarf. I really wanted to do what my husband expected of me, but I found it very difficult to follow the rules. But it's okay now.'*

During the first year of marriage, Sariye had a job working as a packer at a flower auction. But when Mustafa was born, she stopped working to devote herself entirely to the care and raising of her son. Samed was born a few years later.

Sariye enjoys raising her children. She likes to keep busy with them as much as possible and gives them lots of attention. Sariye says she's learned that from *Samenspel*. She reads them books, sings songs, plays all sorts of games with them and often goes out with her two little sons. Moreover, she tries to stimulate their independence. At first, she would always help them; now she lets them try a great deal on their own: *'Samed can already put on his clothes and brush his teeth. He's also allowed to help me when I'm cooking. That usually goes okay, but sometimes he's very naughty. Then I have to keep an eye on him the whole time.'* Samed used to go to Samenspel, but recently he's been going to the pre-school three times a week. He is much more outgoing than his older brother. He enjoys playing with other children and experiencing different toys, and he's already learning a bit of Dutch: *'Important for when he has to go to primary school,'* says Sariye. Unfortunately, she doesn't see the women from Samenspel anymore. She used to enjoy sitting together and chatting, and exchanging child-rearing experiences. These days, if Samed is at the pre-school, Sariye is mostly alone at home: *'My husband tries to get me to go out, to do something like follow a Dutch language course, but I just don't feel like it. I like being at home. I take care of the housekeeping and I have time to cook. I love that – making delicious things to eat. Maybe later, when Samed goes to primary school too, I'll take a course or get my driver's license.'*

When Sariye's husband comes home from work, he plays a lot with the children, too. On Sundays he takes his family to the swimming pool or to the 'ball room' at McDonald's – a favourite spot of Mustafa and Samed. Otherwise the whole family goes on an outing together or visits relatives in the weekend. Sariye and her husband usually agree on the upbringing of their children. But her husband is stricter with the rules and sets more limits, according to Sariye: *'An agreement is an agreement with my husband. So if they're supposed to be inside by half past seven, he holds them to it. I'll look the other way if I see that they're still playing happily outside. I want to spoil my children and give them everything they ask for. I can hardly stand it when they cry.'*

Sariye has no explicit ideas or wishes for the future. Naturally she hopes for a good education and jobs for her sons, but she thinks that it's still too early to make all kinds of plans. Her husband sometimes thinks about returning to Turkey or whether they should send the children there for secondary school. Sariye doesn't want that, she's had enough changes in her life. Holidays in Turkey are fine, but she's always glad to be home again: *'The Netherlands is beautiful and the people are friendly. I know my way around here. And what I like most is that everything is so well organised. You automatically get a doctor through your insurance, you can't afford that in Turkey. Maybe I'll go back someday, but I'd have to get really rich first.'*

PROBLEM FORMULATION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Problem formulation of the research

The research focused on: *what changes the mothers experience through their participation in Samenspel? These changes can concern their children as well as themselves and/or their environment.*

The problem was split into two core questions:

- What do the mothers experience through their participation in *Samenspel?*
  Issues for consideration are:
  - pedagogical attitude,
  - development of the child,
  - child-rearing and interaction between mother and child,
  - the mother and her immediate environment.

- What changes do the mothers indicate as a result of their participation in *Samenspel?*
  Issues for consideration are:
  - stimulation of developmental areas of the child,
  - mother's child-rearing techniques and educational skills
  - mother's personal growth.

Establishing the work plan

The first phase of the research resulted in a questionnaire. To begin with, an inventory based on the literature and materials developed by *Samenspel* was made of the possible changes which involvement in the project could bring about. It was determined that *Samenspel* expects changes in two areas: in the development of the child and in the mothers' child-rearing techniques and educational skills. These expected changes were then subdivided into subjects. At the request of *Samenspel*, additional subjects concerning reaching mothers and their motivation were also included.

A list of interview subjects resulted, namely:
- reaching mothers
- motivation for participation,
- language issues (mother tongue/Dutch),
- importance of the play leaders (mother tongue/Dutch),
- doing things together with the child,
- allowing the child to act independently,
- discussing child-rearing,
- activities during the playgroups,
- changes in the child,
- changes in the mother,
- playgroups as a meeting and learning place,
- preparation for going on to pre-school and primary school.

Research methodology

Described briefly in the following section are the issues which were considered to be of importance in the selection of the mothers to be interviewed, the administration of the question list, and the processing of the resulting data.

Choice of target group

Predominantly mothers take part in the *Samenspel* playgroups. Mothers are also the ones most involved in the children's upbringing and guidance on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, these are the most important people on whom to focus the objectives of *Samenspel* in the areas of child development and child-rearing. For these reasons, mothers comprised the study's target group.

Choice of research method

Samenspel wanted to gain insight into the effects of the programme as experienced and expressed by the mothers. Therefore, the method of qualitative research was chosen, in which the comments, ideas, and reasoning of the mothers would take central stage. Their interpretations and explanations formed the foundation of the research, which could form the basis for further evaluation.

Questionnaire

The composition of the questionnaire was subject to a number of conditions. The questions had to be understandable, translatable, unambiguous, logical, socially acceptable and non-suggestive. Questions which fell outside the mothers' experience had to be avoided.

The questionnaire underwent two types of pre-testing. First, play leaders and employees from *Samenspel*, and other experts working in the same field, critically evaluated the questions, taking account of the conditions mentioned above. Second, a few test interviews were conducted. The final questionnaire was formulated in line with the results of these pre-tests. (see Appendix 1)

Answer categories

Answer categories were also composed along with the questionnaire, based on the mothers' expected responses, which enabled the interviewer to continue the questionnaire in a clear

and simple way. This proved successful even if a mother refused to allow the interview to be recorded. The use of these categories also facilitated the processing of the data.

Selecting the subjects

In selecting the mothers for the study, their cultural background was taken into account, as well as the fact that many of the women were not familiar with concepts such as 'interview' and 'research'. Also considered were the various languages that the mothers speak. Information about the study and requests for participation were provided in their own languages in translated letters and taped cassettes.

The *Samenspel* play leaders, and especially those who spoke the relevant languages, played an important role in the selection. They distributed information about the study during the playgroups, translated when necessary, and spoke individually to the women.

It was important to create and ensure a safe environment. Furthermore, the wishes and availability of the mothers regarding the place and time of the interview, the language in which the interview was conducted, and the availability of child care were all taken into consideration.

Sample justification

At the commencement of the study, there was virtually no data available at central level about the mothers who participate in *Samenspel*. The researchers have since obtained an up-to-date overview of data through the play leaders and the mothers themselves.

Overview of Samenspel participants

Mothers with a Turkish background are the most represented group of participants at *Samenspel*, followed by Moroccan and Antillean participants. A few mothers have different backgrounds. One third of the total group speak Dutch in addition to their own language. At the time of the study a slightly larger number of boys than girls were participating in *Samenspel*.

The most common family configuration of the participants consists of a mother, father and one or two children. The Antillean group has the highest percentage of unmarried mothers and the Turkish group has the lowest. More detailed information about the composition of the *Samenspel* mothers group is contained in Appendix 2.

Research group

The research group consisted of 35 mothers: 18 Turkish, 9 Moroccan, and 5 Antillean. The three remaining mothers were Guyanese, Pakistani, and Dutch. The mothers went to six different *Samenspel* playgroups in Rotterdam. In Appendix 3, further information about the research group can be found.

Interview format

In-depth interviews with open-ended questions were chosen for the study, as this method of data-gathering best suited the research problem definition. It gave the mothers the opportunity to tell about their own experiences and thoughts, in the language with which they felt most comfortable. It also allowed mothers who speak an unwritten language, such as Berber, to participate in the study. Another advantage of this form of interviewing was that the interviewer could immediately interpret and elaborate upon the verbal and non-verbal reactions of the mother.

All the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. This ensured personal contact, an important condition for allowing the women to discuss their experiences, opinions and ideas.

Reliability of interpreters

Because of language differences between the mothers and the researchers, an interpreter was present at a number of the interviews. The *Samenspel* play leaders filled this role, because they:

- speak the mothers' languages and have the same cultural backgrounds;
- have experience working with the mothers;
- have gained the trust of the mothers;
- know everything about *Samenspel* and are familiar with the relevant terminology.

A special meeting was organised to prepare the play leaders. The interview format, the questionnaire, and the 'golden rules' of interpreting were discussed during this meeting, among other things. To decrease the chance of conforming answers, a condition was set that the interpreting play leader had to be from another *Samenspel* playgroup than the one that the mother visited, and the play leader and the mother should not know each other.

Interview structure

The interview consisted of three phases: an introduction with an explanation of how the interview would proceed, the administration of the questionnaire, and a conclusion. The questionnaire is contained in Appendix 1.

On average, it took an hour to go through the questions. The interview was recorded, unless the mother objected to this. Recording had the advantage that the researchers could focus on the interviewing technique (attentive listening and questioning). At the same time, it offered the possibility of reproducing verbatim interesting comments by the mothers.

Processing the data

During the period in which the interviews were being conducted, the researchers also began to process the conversations. The responses given to each question were aggregated into answer categories. Further, those comments which could serve as deviating or substantiating quotes were highlighted for each question. Analysis and interpretation of the data then took place, followed by the writing of the research report.

In retrospect

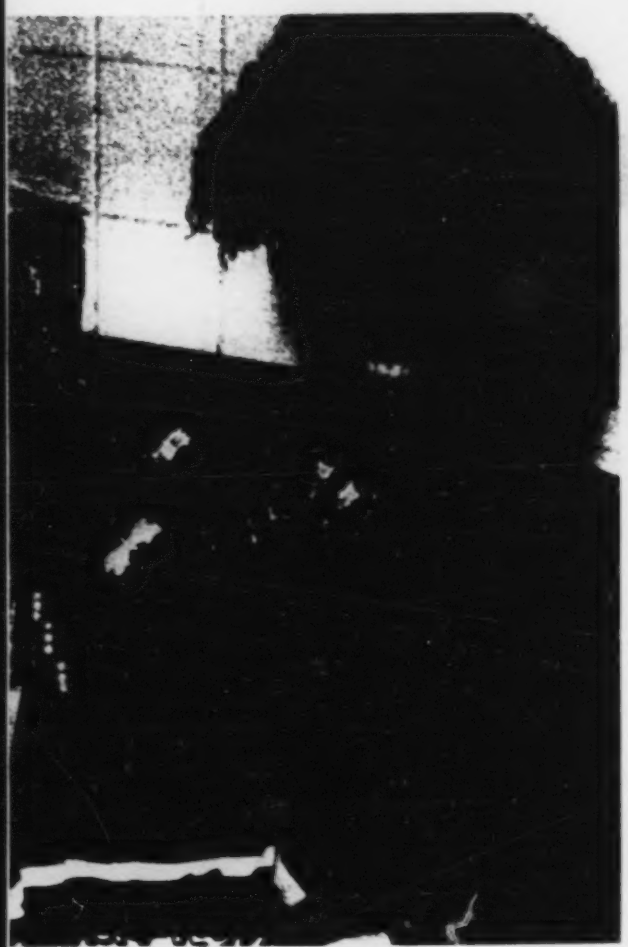
Extra activities are inherent in conducting a study on a target group such as the *Samenspel* participants. Examples would be translating activities, developing contacts with play leaders and mothers, organising and implementing a meeting for interpreters, and taking stock of the mothers' wishes. It is advisable to adequately plan for these activities to allow a study to progress satisfactorily.

The results of the study were presented first to the mothers at a well-attended meeting. This was particularly appreciated by them.

Portrait of Evelyn Mook:

'My independence sets a good example for my daughter'

A Thursday morning at the pre-school centre *''t Wieltje'* (the Little Wheel) in the Rotterdam neighbourhood of Tarwebuurt. Parents are coming and going, dropping off their children at the playgroup. One little girl is standing at the window, waving enthusiastically. Her mother waves back, walks over to her bicycle, waves once more, and rides away. The little girl's face falls. Luckily, play leader Maria Comenencia is there to comfort her. A laugh quickly bursts out. The girl runs to the doll corner, grabs a teddy bear and reprimands him, saying, *'You can't leave, you know!'*



This morning the group consists of 10 children of pre-school age, most of them either Dutch or Antillean. Eline, the two and a half year old daughter of Evelyn Mook is amongst them. She's recently started going to the pre-school two mornings a week, and on Tuesday afternoons she attends *Samenspel* together with her mother. Eline enjoys it very much. She's able to play nicely with the other children and there are lots of fun toys. But what Eline enjoys most of all is singing songs.

However, today the activities can't hold her attention. She's noticed that her mother is sitting in a side room with Maria for an interview. Every 10 minutes, Eline comes to see if her mother is still there.

Evelyn Mook looks tenderly at her daughter on the other side of the door. And Eline looks adorable, too, with her braided hair ('In Papiamento[3] that's called *gini*,' says Evelyn), a red and blue ribbon on top of her head, and wearing a denim outfit and knitted vest with white fringe. Evelyn: *'Eline is allowed to pick out her own clothes. She can already dress herself a bit without any help. She can put on her own jacket and socks and shoes, but she can't do up the laces yet. And she always wants to feed herself – she gets mad if I try to help her. At first that bothered me, but I've learned at Samenspel that it's good that she does things herself. Now I let her try things out and just watch to see how far she gets.'*

Independence is important for Evelyn Mook. It was the reason behind her coming to the Netherlands. She lived in Curaçao with her parents and her four brothers and five sisters until she was 18. Her parents were strict and they arranged everything for their children: *'For example, we couldn't even buy our own clothes. They bought clothing for us and we had to wear it. We had very little freedom and, as a girl, I had even less freedom than my brothers. My parents meant well, but I felt imprisoned. I wanted to lead my own life, to better myself. So I had to go to the Netherlands. It would never have been possible in Curaçao with my family so close by,'* explains Evelyn.

In December 1989 she left for the Netherlands with her secondary school diploma in hand to pursue her studies. Acquaintances arranged a room for her in Rotterdam and familiarised her with her new country. Yet the early days were difficult. She had the independence and freedom that she'd longed for, but the transition from a big family to living alone was a huge one. Now she had to take care of everything herself: applying for school and registering at the employment office; signing up for social benefits; and visiting temporary agencies to find work. Evelyn: *'The*

continued on next page

3 Papiamento is the local patois of the Netherlands Antilles.

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Netherlands is a lot different from Curaçao, but it was pretty much what I expected. What I really like here are all the stores close to home and the enormous choice of food. I love the cold, the change of the seasons. In Curaçao, I could sometimes just sit quietly, doing nothing for hours, but here I'm always busy. I'm always running out of time, there's so much I want to do. The best thing is that not everyone knows or meddles in your business.' Still, she misses things from Curaçao: *'The gorgeous beaches and bays. Hearing Papiamento the whole day long on the radio. The rhythm of the music. And there's one special girlfriend that I miss. We write to each other.'*

During her first few years in the Netherlands, Evelyn followed a course for administrative work, occasionally worked through temporary agencies, and began to meet people. She began to feel at home. Then she became pregnant. The pregnancy was unplanned, but she had no doubts even for a moment, despite knowing she would have to raise the child alone – she no longer has a relationship with Eline's father. Evelyn simply points out: *'Antillean men want a lot of freedom. They like the idea of a child, but not the obligations that go with it. Many Antillean women are on their own. I'd like to have a relationship, but only one where we both raise the children and take care of the household together – like I sometimes see with Dutch couples. Otherwise forget it.'*

Although Evelyn speaks Dutch well, she's raising her daughter to speak Papiamento. It was at *Samenspel* that she heard that it's important for a child to learn his or her mother tongue. At the pre-school, Eline is learning Dutch. Sometimes she'll play a joke on her mother. *'Now and then she'll act like she doesn't understand Papiamento'* says Evelyn, laughing. *'Then I have to speak Dutch. She knows exactly when she has to speak which language. When she sees our Dutch neighbour, she always politely addresses her in Dutch while she's speaking Papiamento with me.'*

Evelyn spends a great deal of time with Eline. She is currently looking for work, but as long as she doesn't have a job, she enjoys just being with her daughter. They talk a lot, and sing songs and play all kinds of games together. Evelyn: *'She imitates me in everything. She repeats what I say and if I go to make tea, Eline does the same thing with her play tea set.'* If the weather is good, they go outside or visit Evelyn's sister, who has two children.

Evelyn entered the *Samenspel* programme when she noticed that Eline needed to meet other children. *'We're just the two of us at home, but a child also wants to play with other children. She is happiest when she's outside, running, playing with a ball. But if the other kids start to fight, she walks away. She hates that.'* Eline has changed through *Samenspel*. She has become more independent and it's easier for her to make contact with children. Evelyn thinks that the playgroups are important for herself, too, because she has the opportunity to talk about child-rearing and development with the play leaders and the other mothers: *'I'm a young mother. I have a lot to learn. So it's nice to get advice about what to do.'*

Compared to her own upbringing, Evelyn is much less strict with her daughter. *'She is so sweet with Eline,'* adds play leader Maria. Evelyn also thinks that this is the most important part of child-rearing: to give her child love. And trust: *'If you give your child trust right from the start, you feel sure about each other. Then you have a basis for later.'*

Evelyn has many plans for the future. She wants to follow some courses and, hopefully, start her own business – something with lingerie and swimwear. For the time being, she doesn't want any more children, and a relationship would be welcome but isn't necessary: *'First study and work, set up a business. A man might always leave again, but the business remains,'* she says in a slightly joking voice. Evelyn has her hopes set on a good education for her daughter, but Eline can choose her own path: *'What matters is that she's independent later, that she can organise her own life. As a mother, I have to set a good example for that.'*

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Reaching the mothers

The following questions are discussed in this section: How did the mothers receive information about *Samenspel*? What were their reasons for visiting the playgroups? How do they attempt to recruit other mothers to *Samenspel*?

Information folders and coincidental meetings

Nearly half of the mothers heard about *Samenspel* in an **informal way**, often through *Samenspel* participants, such as sisters, sisters-in-law, family members, friends and neighbours. A number of mothers said that they were recruited through a chance meeting with a teacher at the primary school, in the community centre, at the playground, or, as one mother said: *'I was visiting another mother just as a Samenspel play leader arrived to see her.'*

Most of the remaining mothers heard about *Samenspel* in a **formal way**. They read a folder or were informed through the primary school, the pre-school or community centre, or. Play leaders that were present at such locations played an active role in recruitment. One mother named a health centre as the information source and another, the social services.

A few participants heard about the project in both an informal and a formal way. One mother: *'My neighbour had gone to an information afternoon at the primary school. She told me about what she had heard and then we went to visit Samenspel together.'*

'A child should be able to live it up with other children'

The mothers offer more reasons why they started to visit *Samenspel*. Foremost was that their children could meet other children at the playgroups. *'I only have one child and he was bored at home. I saw that he needed others his own age.'*

'Sometimes my child would be sitting alone by the window. If he saw children playing outside, he'd call: "Look, Mama, children".'

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Half of the mothers go to *Samenspel* to adequately prepare their children for primary education. The playgroups are educational because the children can play with toys and they get used to being without their mothers. *'I see that my older child has difficulty keeping up in primary school. I don't want my youngest child to go through the same thing later. I want to give him a head start by going to Samenspel.'*

Some of the mothers say the reason is so that their children can learn Dutch during the playgroups: *'That's good for later when she goes to the primary school.'* One mother names learning their own language as the motivation. Also, a number of women participate in *Samenspel* to change their children's behaviour. For example, someone said: *'I wanted my child to be more independent and less clingy with me.'*

Another reason is that their children are not yet ready to go a pre-school alone. One mother turns this around: *'You don't have to go there alone because you can go together with your child.'*
Some participants go to *Samenspel* just to get out more often with their children: *'It's boring to sit the whole day alone at home with your child. That's not good for us.'*
Desiring contact with other mothers was also given as a motivation by a few. And finally, other reasons offered for going to the playgroups were that pre-schools have long waiting lists, and the fact that *Samenspel* is free.

Good and fun
A third of the mothers report that they have been able to recruit other women to *Samenspel*: *'I've already brought quite a few mothers here. I tell them that it's free, that it's good for their child and fun and sociable for them. I say: "Just try it once. You've got nothing to lose. Do it for your child"'* Other mothers have tried to do the same, but so far without success: *'You could always force them to leave the house, but they also have to want to do it themselves.'*

A few mothers remark that recruitment has not completely reached everyone yet. They wish that more was being done about reaching mothers and that participants would engage in more word-of-mouth advertising. They think it's a shame that many parents still don't know what *Samenspel* is.

'If I had known about Samenspel when my other children were still young, I would have definitely gone. They all missed this.'

'The men should be better informed about Samenspel. Often, it's an issue of money and other priorities. They don't know what a pre-school is and that it's important. Men and women have to understand that it is valuable.'

Summary
The mothers receive information about *Samenspel* via informal as well as formal channels. Recruitment is wide and varied, proceeding primarily through a network of women. Reasons for participating in *Samenspel* have to do predominantly with the best interest of the children. The most significant motivation is enabling the children to meet other children. Also, the playgroups serve as a preparation for primary school, according to the mothers: children learn how to play with toys and get used to doing things without their mothers.

Samenspel activities

Activities which involve the participation of both the mothers and the children take place during the *Samenspel* playgroups. Also, information is provided and special information meetings are sometimes held. What are the mothers' experiences with these activities and do they appreciate them? What do the children think of *Samenspel*?

Arts and crafts and singing together are popular

'By doing arts and crafts, my child will understand how things work at some point in the future.'

The mothers find different *Samenspel* activities enjoyable. A quarter of the group spontaneously responds that they think everything is fun. The same number finds everything enjoyable that their children enjoy doing. *'The playful side of me has come out. During the activities I feel just like a kid again. Sometimes we look at each other while we're playing and we have to laugh at ourselves.'*

Activities that appeal to a large number of the women are those which they can do together with their children. The most popular are drawing, cutting and pasting, and the group activities involving singing and snack-time. One mother says: *'Making something – that's what I like to do.'*

Many mothers encounter certain activities or materials for the very first time at the playgroups: *'I had never worked with clay before. I noticed that it was good for the development of the imagination because you could create something yourself.'*

One fourth of the participants enjoy drinking coffee or tea with each other, but not everyone is enthusiastic about this. One mother prefers to be actively busy. Another says: *'I can enjoy a nice cup of coffee at home. That's not why I come here.'*

Valuable lessons for later

Most of the mothers appreciate the activities primarily because they are educational. The children have the opportunity to learn using toys, material, and activities. The mothers believe that this is important for the future, when the children go to school: *'Through free play, your child has the chance to learn how to choose, and that's important.'*

Furthermore, the women rate the activities positively because it's an opportunity for them to experience pleasurable moments with their children. They also acquire new ideas or learn something to take back home: *'At Samenspel I saw that my child loved playing with puzzles. So I asked the play leader where you could buy things like that.'*

A few participants find the playgroups sometimes too crowded, which they think results in their children not being able to concentrate. One mother suggests limiting the size of the playgroups. Another mother thinks that some of the activities are less suitable than others: *'Working with clay is difficult. My child is still too young for that. He puts the clay in his mouth.'*

Information about education, child-rearing and future opportunities
'I would really like to know more about child-rearing and language development. If there's a course for that, I want to find out about it.'

At the playgroups, information is exchanged during conversations with the play leaders and amongst the women themselves. Sometimes special information meetings are held to discuss educational topics. Most of the mothers are satisfied with the information provided, although some said they would like even more information. For example, in terms of the subject 'primary school', they would like to be more broadly informed on curriculum, how the teachers deal with the pupils and the parents, the differences between schools, and how to choose a school for your children.

A number of mothers want other types of information: *'I don't want my child to fall into the same situation as I did: no education and unable to speak Dutch. More information has to be provided on how you can stimulate the development of your child and how you can give a child opportunities for a promising future.'*

One participant says that she doesn't find all the information sessions equally enjoyable: *'It's just like you're sitting in a lesson being told how you should raise your child. It gets boring – especially when it goes on too long.'*

A number of mothers haven't been to an information session yet, but they hope to in the near future.

'My *child is crazy about Samenspel*'
The majority of the mothers spontaneously say that their children are very enthusiastic about *Samenspel*. A few responses:
'She talks about it every day and when the playgroup is over, she sometimes cries.'
'Sometimes my child will be standing by my bed early in the morning, asking if we can go to the "school" today.'

A third of the mothers say that their children enjoy all the activities. Others indicate that their children especially enjoy playing with the toys and engaging in the activities such as drawing and colouring. *'My child sees all those toys. He's asked his father if he can have all that stuff, too.'* Group activities and playing with other children are mentioned less frequently.

Some mothers say that their children enjoy the freedom and the toys which are available at *Samenspel*: *'It's just like a special playground – they can do everything and everything is there for them.'* Several mothers mention 'riding a bike'; one says that there is no room for this at home.

A number of participants report that their children do not like sitting and waiting, especially if it's for long. They can't handle that. The children will stand up and walk away, interrupt, or become restless and bored. Other drawbacks listed by the mothers are children grabbing toys, arguing or fighting, or simply getting dirty. One mother: *'My child prefers not to paint or model with clay because he's afraid of getting dirty, while these are exactly the kinds of things that I like doing.'* It was also reported that a few children don't like it when their mothers sit together for a chat a bit away from them for a while.

Summary

The women appreciate the activities that they do together with their children especially. They find these activities to be educational and, through them, they experience positive moments with their children.

Most of the mothers are satisfied with the information disseminated by *Samenspel*. Yet a number feel that they need additional and sometimes different information, for example, concerning future opportunities for their children.

The majority of the children most enjoy playing with the toys, and the arts and crafts activities. Several mothers talk about their children enjoying the unique freedom and opportunities of *Samenspel*. The least popular activity among the younger set is 'sitting and waiting.'

Samenspel playgroup leaders

In principle, two play leaders are present during the playgroups: a mother tongue play leader and a Dutch speaking play leader. What do the mothers think of this?

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Speaking and learning the mother tongue

The overwhelming majority of the mothers think that having a mother tongue play leader is important, for themselves as well as for their children. One reason for this, according to the mothers, is that mother tongue play leaders can provide explanations for things that are unclear in Dutch. And they can talk to the mothers in their own language. Another reason is that the children can improve their mother tongue. A few mothers indicate that they feel surer of themselves at the playgroups when a play leader is present with the same cultural background.

Introduction to the Dutch language

Almost all the mothers find the presence of a Dutch-speaking play leader important as a means to acquaint themselves and their children with the Dutch language. A few say that this gives their children the opportunity to get used to a Dutch play leader and the Dutch culture.

A number of participants find the presence of two play leaders less important, because they themselves can speak both languages well. One mother expresses something else: *'I'm with a multicultural Samenspel group. It's nice, but I don't have a very good command of Dutch and I don't know any Moroccan Arabic or Turkish. I'd love to have a play leader who speaks my language so that I could follow everything better and join in.'*

Summary

Most of the mothers find the presence of play leaders who speak their own language and those who speak Dutch, important for their children in learning and speaking these languages. The cultural aspect plays a less important role.

Samenspel as a meeting place

'I used to only leave the house to do the errands. Now I've got to know more women in the neighbourhood.'

'I see that some of the women really look forward to the playgroups, especially those who don't speak Dutch.'

Cheering each other up and exchanging recipes

Nearly all the mothers are positive about the fact that they meet other women at the *Samenspel* playgroups, especially since they can talk with one another there. They find it fun and sociable, and support and cheer each other up: *'Sometimes you're sad. You talk about that with each other. Or you talk about your husband. Or just exchange recipes.'*

Almost half of the mothers also think it is important to exchange experiences about child care or other matters (see the following section). A few women report that, besides positive experiences, they've also had less positive experiences when coming into contact with the other women. They don't always enjoy the topics of conversation, especially when the discussions get heated.

Summary

Meeting other women at *Samenspel* has been a positive experience for nearly all the mothers, certainly for those who previously rarely left the house and had few contacts. The mothers support one another by talking and exchanging experiences.

At home: Talking with mothers and sisters

In their daily lives, the women talk with different people about child-rearing. For approximately half of the group interviewed, these individuals are family members such as mothers, sisters and sisters-in-law. Some also discuss child-rearing with one or more girlfriends. Further, the health centre is indicated as an official institution where they can go to talk about this subject.

A number of participants indicate that, outside of *Samenspel*, there's not a large choice of people with whom to talk about child-rearing. This is partly due to the fact that they also know relatively few people.

The majority of the mothers are married. Of these women, one third discuss child-rearing with their husband: '*I talk with him a lot about child-rearing. It is our child and we are responsible for him together. My husband was the one who motivated me to go to Samenspel.*' The remaining married mothers rarely talk about this subject with their husband. One woman says: '*We're man and wife, not friends.*' Another explains: '*Child-rearing and housekeeping are women's business in our culture. That's sometimes tough. My husband works a lot.*'

***Samenspel:* Sometimes it's the only place to talk**

'At the playgroups you can talk with other mothers. They have experience, too. I can learn from them and perhaps they can learn a little from me.'

Talking about child-rearing at *Samenspel* is for the overwhelming majority of mothers a positive thing. They say, for example, that you hear the opinions of others, you experience support, you see that you're not alone, and you can bring up questions and get things off your mind. That's a relief for the mothers. For some, *Samenspel* is the only place where they can go to talk. Half of the women discuss child-rearing with the play leaders, talking about alternatives, exchanging experiences and obtaining tips. One mother: '*You hear and see a lot. You choose for yourself what you want to try. It has to fit with you and your child.*' A smaller percentage of participants acknowledge that they prefer to only listen to the discussions.

Many think it is important to talk with a woman who is also a mother: '*If you have a child yourself, you understand better. You know what it is to be a mother.*'

'*I used to have all those great ideas, but when I had a child myself, I saw that it was completely different.*'

Talking about child-rearing holds less significance for the remaining mothers. They either don't feel the need for it or they would rather discuss other topics. A few participants think that attention on child-rearing is reduced if the women bring their handiwork with them to the playgroups.

Summary

Some discuss child-rearing at home, primarily with female family members or friends. For many others, *Samenspel* is the only place to discuss this subject. They attach much value to this. More than fifty per cent prefer to talk to someone who also has children.

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Language Development

At home: Identifying and explaining things, and reading aloud

The mothers do several things at home to stimulate the language development of their children. A large percentage teach the names of individuals, materials, and concepts in their children's life in their own language. Half of the women also sometimes do this in Dutch. Two thirds of the women read to their children. In addition, many provide explanations when their children are watching television. One mother is very focused on the development of language: *'I attended primary school here myself and I know what's expected of the children. I'm teaching my child the alphabet, writing and counting now. We make things together and sing along with the songs on a cassette.'*

A few mothers also mention the manner in which they talk with their children, such as using the right pronunciation or asking their children questions. Some mothers use the Dutch language to give their children structure or to have them listen: *'I speak Dutch when I ask them to do something, such as "clean up" or "eat" or "go to sleep".'*
'I know a few words, like "don't do that" and "stop it". They listen better if I say it in Dutch.'

At Samenspel: playing, talking and singing songs

The mothers are unanimous in their belief that playgroup activities stimulate language development. The children are given the opportunity to learn either their own language or Dutch better, through the offering of new concepts and words. Three quarters of the mothers find singing songs to be an important activity in this context; half think that their children are acquiring language skills by playing and talking with other children.

Some participants say that there is too little Dutch spoken during the playgroups. They would like this to be increased: *'At home, my child speaks mostly Turkish with children and adults. And he also speaks Turkish here with the other children and women. He's not going to learn any Dutch like this.'*

Another mother expresses a different view: *'Now I understand that you first have to learn your own language and only then can you learn Dutch.'*

Changes in the mother

'Now I'm reading aloud and we sing songs. Before I never sang with my kids and I'd never heard of special children's books. I never used to do anything with my children at home.'

More than two thirds of the mothers indicate one or more changes in the ways in which they stimulate the language development of their children. Half are singing songs at home or they've added songs from *Samenspel* to their repertoire. Also, nearly half of the mothers borrow books from *Samenspel*; others are buying books and a few have become members of the public library.

One out of three women is talking and providing explanations more frequently to their children. *'I've become much more aware of how you can teach a child language. Now I involve my child more in what I do and I'm talking to him more.'*

Approximately a third of the mothers report no changes. A segment of this group had already engaged in different activities to teach their children language skills before joining *Samenspel*; this has not changed. The others don't come to *Samenspel* frequently enough to be able to say something about changes.

Changes in the child

'My child is talking more and is happy to tell others about what he's been doing at Samenspel.'

More than a third of the mothers see changes in their children's language development. They are talking more and can express themselves better, through better pronunciation or a larger vocabulary. *'Sometimes my child says words that I haven't heard myself in a long time. He's got them from other children.'* A few mothers indicate that their children better understand what is being said. Some children are also speaking more Dutch at home.

'My child is now enjoying looking at picture books. As soon as we come home, he gets the books from Samenspel out of my bag. My child is motivated and proud of himself.'

Two thirds of the mothers cannot indicate any changes in the language development of their children.

Summary

Every mother believes that the *Samenspel* programme stimulates their children's language development. A majority is now more consciously involved in this aspect of their children's growth; for example, at home they are singing more songs with their children, reading books to them, and talking more frequently with them.

One third of the mothers also see changes in the children themselves: they talk more and can better express themselves.

Socio-emotional development

The child's contacts at home

Besides the mother, with whom does the child associate in his or her daily life? The mothers were nearly unanimous in answering this question: most contacts take place within the family circle. If there are other children in the family, the child spends most of his/her time with them. One of every three women reports that her child also has contacts with children in the neighbourhood.

Doing things together with the child

More than thirty per cent of the mothers immediately say that they do 'everything' together with their children. A few add that they have no choice in this. A small number say that they do little together because their children amuse themselves.

Opinions differ when it comes to involving children in household activities. Some of the women think this should not be done: *'I was brought up with the custom that keeping house is my responsibility and not the child's. They have to grow up first.'* Or: *'I don't involve my child in the housekeeping. He's a boy, I shouldn't confuse him.'* But another mother says: *'I have two sons and we do all sorts of housekeeping things together. That's*

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good for later, if I'm not around anymore. They can do lots already. I'm very proud of them.'

The women talk enthusiastically about what they do together with their children. They mostly experience this as fun, pleasurable and a good thing to do. *'It means so much to me because, by doing things together, you can see that your child really loves you.'* Moreover, some indicate that 'doing things together' strengthens the bond with their children and is also educational. *'I learn about my child and my child learns from me. It makes my child happy and he's listening to me better.'*

However, a smaller percentage find this to be only sometimes enjoyable: *'If I'm busy, it's annoying. Sure, it can be nice, but if your child doesn't want to listen, it can be intense.'*

Changes in the mother

'I do more with my child now: playing together, going outside in the summer. Or my husband takes us to the playground.'

More than two thirds of the participants say that they're handling the stimulation of their children's social development differently because of *Samenspel*. They have attained more insight into the importance of doing things together. They also give their children more attention than before. *'At Samenspel you give your child special attention, like doing a puzzle together. Then you give your child more attention at home, too, even if you're busy.'* Some mothers now keep 'special hours' for giving their children attention. *'I make a point of keeping a half-hour free every day. It's fun. And my child is listening to me better and showing me more respect.'*

Many women do more or different types of things with their children at home, such as repeating the *Samenspel* activities. *'My child is allowed to help me more in the housekeeping. I see that they enjoy that.'*

They also now find it more important that their children play with other children. One mother says: *'Playing together is learning!'* A few also indicate that they're directing their children's play more. *'Before, if there was an argument about toys, I didn't bother with it. Now I intervene. I want them to learn to share.'*

More than 25 per cent of the mothers report no change in themselves. This is partly because their outlook hasn't changed. For example, one participant says: *'I'm not doing anything differently*

than I did before. I have gotten the idea that doing things together is fun and educational.' A final group of women don't attend *Samenspel* frequently enough to be able to report changes.

Changes in the child

'My child is less shy and approaches other children more quickly.'

Three quarters of the women say that their children have become more socially skilled through their participation in the playgroups. They get along better with other children and play together better. Other reported changes are: the child listens better; is less shy; cleans up his or her toys; shares better with other children; cries less; argues less; and breaks fewer things. One mother: *'My child used to be very noisy and wild while he was playing. Now he plays more quietly and argues less.'*

A few women mention that their children respond better to adults or have become more interested in other children. *'My child has made friends at Samenspel.'*

Summary

The children predominantly spend time with their immediate and extended family in their daily lives. The mothers undertake different activities with their children and, for the most part, consider that a positive experience. Since participating in *Samenspel*, many mothers are dealing with their children's socio-emotional development with more awareness. They have obtained more insight into the significance of doing things together. The majority think that their children have also changed through *Samenspel*: their social skills have improved.

Developing independence

Showing, helping when asked, encouraging, and taking over

'I'm not going to correct something that my child has done himself. Like when he's put on his own socks and they're backwards.'

Laughing, yet full of pride, the mothers talk about their children's achievements. Of course they some-times help their children if they try to do something alone. But how do they do that? From the answers provided, four forms of support can be distinguished. Some mothers use more than one form.

More than two thirds of the mothers offer explanations or instructions, or show by doing something themselves. This is called functional support. Also, many support their children by giving them 'space': they first let the children try something themselves and then only help if the children ask for it. More than one third of the mothers provide emotional support, encouraging and complimenting their children. A small percentage helps their children by completing the activity themselves.

A few women who have more children notice that the older brothers and sisters act as role models for the younger children. One mother believes that independence only arises after the fifth year: *'Then it's time for the child to learn things. Now they're too young.'* Children react differently to the assistance provided. One mother: *'If my child tries to do something himself and it doesn't immediately work, he gets mad and screams that I have*

to do it.' However most of the children want to do everything themselves: '*My child is so bright, he wants to do everything alone. I'm absolutely not supposed to help or he gets furious.*'

Changes in the mother

'*When my child used to ask for milk, I'd get it for him. Now I let my child get it out of the refrigerator himself.*'

Almost half of the mothers find that they're now handling independence differently with their children. Through *Samenspel* they've been made aware that children learn by doing things themselves. '*I'm not bothered so much anymore when my child wants to do something for himself. I know that it's okay, that he's learning from this.*'

Also the ways in which the mothers support the independence of their children have changed. They give their children more space to try things out for themselves. And some find that they've become more patient. '*Now I understand that forcing them doesn't do any good, children only learn with freedom. They indicate themselves what they want to learn or try.*'

Others say that when they see their children doing something by themselves, it gives them more confidence in their children. A number have bought toys which their children can play with alone. '*I never gave my child scissors before because I didn't trust them. But since they use scissors at Samenspel, I went and bought a pair of children's scissors for home.*'

A few mothers say that their children's increased independence has positive results for them: '*My child is less dependent, he's no longer constantly asking for my help. I have more space for myself now.*'

Among the mothers who report no change, a few say that they're not doing anything differently in terms of independence development than previously. One group of women has not attended *Samenspel* long enough to be able to report changes. And finally, a number of mothers give no relevant answer on this topic.

Changes in the child

'*My child sings songs and cleans up all by himself.*'

Three quarters of the women say that their children have become more independent through their participation in *Samenspel*. The fact that the children can amuse themselves better or for longer periods of time and that they're less easily bored, is mentioned again and again: '*Now my child regularly plays or colours by himself at home. He amuses himself very well.*' Some of the children, on their own initiative, repeat *Samenspel* activities at home. A number of women report that their children can now go for longer periods of time without them being present.

A few believe that their children have become more independent because they have been given more self-confidence: '*By going to Samenspel, my child feels big and proud of himself because he's already going to "school".*'

Summary

Development of the children's independence is supported by the mothers in different ways. Most mothers offer instructions or explanations, or complete an activity for their children themselves. Nearly half indicate changes in terms of the manner in which they stimulate the development of their children's independence. They now let the children try to do things themselves more often. Three quarters of the participants also notice that their children have become less dependent.

Other changes

In the above sections, changes concerning language, socio-emotional, and independence development have been described. Following are other changes which have been indicated by the mothers.

Getting up and going to bed on time

For a number of mothers, participation in *Samenspel* brings regularity and structure to their daily lives: '*We go to the play mornings. So we have to get up on time to go to school. Then in the evenings, you see that your child is tired from playing with the others and he falls asleep on time.*' Some of the women transfer components from *Samenspel* to the home – sometimes literally: '*I saw how things were always done at regular times – a song being sung or the children eating together. I'm doing this at home now, too. The children are eating better.*'

Being a good role model and setting boundaries

'*I've become gentler. I'm more aware that I can't take my anger out on my child.*'

Many mothers indicate that they have obtained more insight into their children's development and how they can stimulate it. They also realise that they must be a role model for their children. They better understand what they should or should not do. For example, they say that violence on television is not good, that toys should be appropriate for the age of the children, or that it's good for children to go to the children's zoo or the pre-school. One woman says: '*I have more insight into my own ways of dealing with child-rearing. Now I know better about what's good and what's bad for a child. I know about many more ways to get along with your child. I'm also punishing differently. No more hitting, but just sending the children to their room.*'

A few of the mothers are setting more boundaries on the behaviour of their children: '*Now I know that children will push to see how far they can go. Parents have to say "stop" then. I couldn't do that so well at first, but the play leaders have taught me.*'

More fun and flexible

Some mothers say that they have more influence over the behaviour of their children: '*The way I deal with my youngest has changed, but it's also got easier with my older children. We have more fun.*'

A number of the mothers say that the bond with their children has improved. The interaction is smoother and more positive, they share more enjoyable moments and often there's a more pleasant atmosphere at home. Some mothers believe that their children have become sweeter: '*We have nice moments together at Samenspel. I continue that at home. We play and look at books together. Or I let my child make things or paint.*'

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Samenspel: A fun and important outing

The children are enthusiastic about the playgroups. For the mothers, too, *Samenspel* is mostly a fun and sometimes an important moment in the week. Participants describe the playgroups as 'an afternoon out', as a sociable time. And for some, it means even more: their social network has widened by meeting other mothers and being able to talk with them.

'If I don't come here, I don't go anywhere.'

'If I could only adopt another child, then I could come to Samenspel even more often.'

Also, the ties which have formed among the women greatly satisfies a number of mothers: *'I consider the women from Samenspel to be like my family.'*

'I'm still in close touch with a lot of the women who no longer go to Samenspel. You automatically become friends, because the kids want to see one another.'

Appreciation for the changes

Nearly all the mothers speak positively about the changes which they have seen in themselves or their children.

Applying for pre-school

Fifty per cent of the mothers have registered their children for pre-school. They give a number of reasons for this, including:

- it is educational,
- I see that my child enjoys this sort of activity,
- my child can learn Dutch and meet other children,
- after a half-year of *Samenspel* you're required to move on,
- I did it at the request of the play leader,
- the health centre advised me to do this,
- my child can get used to being without me.

One mother says: *'I've talked about it with my child and he very much wanted to go himself.'*

The other half have not (yet) registered their children, mostly because they are either still too young or because they are approaching the school-going age of four years old. Other arguments are:

- the long waiting lists,
- the high costs,
- not knowing whether there is a pre-school in the neighbourhood,
- too complicated to arrange,
- another form of child care has already been arranged.

One mother says that she's not yet ready to have her child away from home so much. Another says: *'It's not necessary. I'm home every day.'* And another indicates that she likes the *Samenspel* set-up better because she can be there as well. A few mothers are planning to register their children for pre-school, but haven't yet done so.

Conclusion

'I'm pregnant and I'm going to bring this baby to Samenspel, too.'

The majority of the participants are satisfied with *Samenspel*. One mother: *'The programme is well-organised, the structure is clear. The playgroups are too short for me but they're long enough for the kids. You see that they get tired.'* A number of them would like to visit the playgroups on more days of the week. Some also think that the information meetings should be longer.

Most of the women are positive about the interviews and their participation in the study. The fact that someone is asking for their opinion is appreciated. A number indicate that the discussion had a clarifying effect on them: *'I didn't know that so much happened at Samenspel.'* Another mother says: *'If I look at it this way, I'm doing a lot more in terms of educating my child than I thought.'*

A final quote to conclude this section: *'I wish I had known as much with my first child as I know now. I want to thank Samenspel.'*

Portrait of Malika Hamimi:
'I often go out with my kids. It's fun and they learn a lot that way.'

There's a quiet atmosphere in the beautiful, new child care centre where the playgroup 'Mengelmoes' is located. It's one in the afternoon and almost all the children in daycare are taking a nap. For the pre-school and Samenspel groups, it's still summer vacation.

Samenspel play leader Najat Fakrani gives a short tour around the building. There are spacious rooms, a fabulous playhouse in the hall, a quiet courtyard for the youngest children and a large playground with climbing equipment for the older ones. Children will be thrilled to come here.

We leave for our meeting with Malika Hamimi. The interview takes place at the home of Malika's sister, Zakia. She welcomes us warmly. Malika is waiting for us in the living room. After a nice cold glass of water, the interview begins. Najat does the translating, because although Malika understands Dutch, she doesn't yet speak it very well. After each question, there's a long exchange in rapid Moroccan Arabic between Malika and Najat. Then Najat summarises the answer concisely in Dutch.

In 1982, Malika and her husband left Morocco for the Netherlands soon after getting married. Malika was then almost 25. She still remembers her first introduction to the Netherlands: *'It was spring, the sun was shining and everything was wonderfully green. I didn't expect that. I had always heard that the Netherlands was cold and rainy, so this wasn't too bad.'* The first few years she and her husband lived in Bilthoven; later they moved to Rotterdam.

Malika had no difficulty with the transition from Morocco to the Netherlands. She did feel homesick a few times, but then she just telephoned her family in Morocco. She actually immediately felt at home in the Netherlands and has continued to feel that way. Malika: *'I feel Moroccan and Morocco is my native country, but I want to stay in the Netherlands. Health care is very good here and I think most of the Dutch are very friendly. You have more rights here, as a man or a woman. In Morocco you need to have a lot of money or know the right people to arrange things. Not here.'*

In Morocco Malika lived in Meknès, a city in the north of the country, in a mountainous area. She came from a big family, with eight sisters and three brothers. Most of the family still lives in Morocco, but two brothers and one sister have also moved to the Netherlands. Her upbringing was not strict, Malika says: *'I have very sweet parents. We'd go as a family to the forest for holidays. My father would make beautiful flower garlands for us. We're Islamic, but we're not very strict. I never had to wear a head scarf, not even when I reached a marriageable age. I think everything was much more liberal in those days – fundamentalism wasn't around yet. I did go to an all-girls school, but there were also*

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mixed schools. I'd go to films with my girl friends – that was never a problem.'

Malika went to primary school until she was 12. Then she stopped with her education. She stayed at home the following years, helping out in the family. From the age of 16 she also had a job outside the home, housekeeping for a French teacher. She did that until she got married. Malika also worked for a long time in the Netherlands as an office cleaner for a large company. That lasted until 1991, when the company was taken over and the entire staff was dismissed. She's been registered with the employment agency ever since, but hasn't been working.

In 1991, Malika's first son, Soufjan, was born. Najib, her second son, followed a year later. Both boys have been to Samenspel with their mother; she wanted them to learn how to play with other children. It also seemed to be a good idea to prepare the boys for primary school. Soufjan is now four and he goes to school. Najib attends the pre-school centre *'Pino'*.

Malika mostly speaks Moroccan Arabic with her children, but sometimes she spontaneously uses Dutch: *'If I know words or sentences in Dutch, I'll say them. Like, "Don't do that, don't fight!"'* Her sister Zakia is married to a Dutchman and Soufjan and Najib also come into contact with the Dutch language through him. They also learn it at pre-school and primary school. Malika believes it's important for her sons to continue to speak and understand their own language, otherwise they can't talk to their family in Morocco.

She likes to go out often with her sons, especially when the weather is good. She goes everywhere on the bicycle – to the park, the children's zoo, the playground – with one child sitting in front and one behind. Soufjan and Najib also think the 'ball room' at McDonald's is great. They can go wild there, playing with other children. At home Malika sometimes watches a cartoon or does a puzzle with the boys, or builds something with Lego or Duplo. Through *Samenspel*, Malika has become a member of the public library and each week she borrows books to read to the children. She also sings songs with them all the time.

Malika thinks that the nicest thing about having her children is simply cuddling and caring for them. Soufjan is very sweet and quiet and listens very well to his mother. Najib, on the other hand, doesn't always listen so well and can, at times, whine about something like wanting to have a toy car. Malika doesn't like that. She would like to give her children everything they ask for, but she doesn't have the money to do that.

The most annoying thing for Malika is that her sons don't always do what she wants them to: *'Sometimes they dawdle, they won't go to bed because they want to stay up. Or they don't want to come in if they're playing outside. When this goes on for too long, I can get really angry with them. Then they have to go to their room. I've learned that from Samenspel. Before, I'd give them a smack on their behinds, but not anymore.'*

As for herself, Malika liked having the contact with the other mothers at Samenspel; she found it to be both sociable and educational. It was nice to be able to exchange experiences and ideas about child-rearing. If she had a real problem, she'd go to the play leaders, mostly to the Moroccan play leader, but she got along well with the Dutch play leader, too: *'I think she's nice. She helped me with my Dutch. It was too bad that we could only go to Samenspel for half a year. That's the policy of 'Mengelmoes', to make sure that the kids then go on to the pre-school. But I miss the contact I had with the other women.'*

Malika doesn't have many plans for the future; she'll just wait and see how things turn out. At times, she jokes with her sons about what they want to be when they grow up. Soufjan says he wants to be a doctor. Najib is thinking about becoming a policeman. Both seem fine to Malika, as long as the boys have a career they're satisfied with. As for herself, Malika would like to take a course to speak Dutch better. She also wants to talk to the employment agency about what educational programmes would be best for her. *'When Soufjan and Najib both go to primary school, I want to go back to work. Preferably at a daycare centre, something like Samenspel. I think it would be great to work with kids. I love children.'*

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SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study, conducted with 35 mothers who participate in the *Samenspel* project, delivered a wealth of information concerning the experiences, perceptions, and ideas of the participants. A point-by-point summary of the most important findings follows.

- Mothers are recruited to *Samenspel* via informal as well as formal channels. Recruitment is wide and varied, proceeding primarily through a network of women.
- Reasons for participating in *Samenspel* have to do predominantly with the best interest of the children. The most common motivation is enabling children to meet other children. Also, the playgroups serve as a preparation for primary school, according to the mothers; children learn how to play with toys and gets used to doing things without their mothers.
- The women especially appreciate the activities that they do together with their children. They find these activities to be instructional and, through them, they experience positive moments with their children. Most of the mothers are satisfied with the information provided by *Samenspel*. Yet a number feel that they need additional and sometimes different information, for example, concerning future opportunities for their children. The majority of the children like playing with the toys and the creative activities best.
- Most of the mothers find the presence of a mother tongue speaking and a Dutch speaking play leader important for learning and speaking the languages. The cultural aspect plays a less important role.
- Meeting other women at *Samenspel* has been a positive experience for nearly all the mothers, certainly for those who previously rarely left the house and had few contacts. The mothers support one another by talking and exchanging experiences.
- The mothers discuss child-rearing at home primarily with female family members or friends. For many, *Samenspel* is the only place to discuss this subject. They attach much value to this.
- Every mother believes that the *Samenspel* programme stimulates their children's language development. A majority are now more consciously involved in this aspect of their children's growth; for example, at home they are singing more songs with their children, reading books to them and talking more frequently with them. One third of

the mothers also see changes in the children themselves: they talk more and can express themselves better.

- The children predominantly spend time with their immediate and extended family in their daily lives. The mothers undertake different activities with their children and consider this to be an overwhelmingly positive experience. Since participating in *Samenspel*, many of the mothers are dealing with their children's socio-emotional development with more awareness. Among other things, they have obtained greater insight into the significance of doing things together. Most of the mothers think that their children have also been changed by *Samenspel*: their social skills have improved.
- Development of the children's independence is supported by the mothers in different ways. Most mothers offer instructions or explanations, or complete an activity for their children themselves. Nearly half indicate changes in terms of the manner in which they stimulate their children's independence development. They now let the children try to do things themselves more often. Three quarters of the participants also notice that their children have become less dependent.
- Fifty per cent of the mothers have registered their children for a pre-school. The other half have not (yet) done so, mostly because their children are still too young or because they are nearly old enough to go to school.

Conclusion

The question being investigated by the study was: *What changes do the mothers experience through their participation in Samenspel? These changes can concern their child as well as themselves or their environment.*

As is apparent in the above summary, the interviewed mothers indicate various changes in a number of areas. First and foremost, the mothers report changes in the ways in which they themselves stimulate the development of their children. In terms of independence development, nearly half of the respondents indicate changes. Also, more than two thirds say that they now handle issues of socio-emotional and language development differently.

The women also observe changes in the children themselves. One third of the respondents think that their children's language development has improved. Seventy-five per cent indicate that their children have become more socially skilled and more independent. Besides changes in the children's development, respondents also mention other diverse changes. For example, that participation in *Samenspel* brings regularity and structure into their daily lives. Many mothers indicate that they've obtained more insight into their children's development and how they can stimulate this. They also mention that they see themselves as a role model for their children. The majority say that they now better understand what they should or should not do. Furthermore, a few mothers are now setting more boundaries on the behaviour of their children.

Some mothers mention that the bond with their child(ren) has changed. The contact is more flexible and more positive, they share more enjoyable moments together, and often there's a more relaxed atmosphere at home.

Finally, participation in *Samenspel* means a change for many women in their personal life. Their social network is widened by meeting other mothers and being able to talk with them about child-rearing and other matters.

What the changes mean

The mothers indicate that they themselves have changed through participation in *Samenspel*. They are also of the opinion that their children's development has been influenced and stimulated by the *Samenspel* activities. To avoid confusion: other environmental factors and elements such as health, age, character, and maturation, of course, also influence the development of a child.

The changes indicated by the women could occur through participation in the playgroups as well as through the effects of the home activities. For example, by the mothers acquiring toys and repeating activities at home with their children, or by the application of new ideas.

The mothers are enthusiastic about *Samenspel* and they positively value the changes. They find *Samenspel* to be educational for both their children and themselves. Participation in *Samenspel* is an enriching experience.

In light of the above results, the conclusion can be made that Samenspel plays a role in the area of educational support, while simultaneously contributing to the improvement of opportunities for children.

Recommendations

The mothers interviewed say that they appreciate the fact that *Samenspel* has asked their opinion. Therefore, it is advisable to continue with this method of involving parents and develop it further. By establishing and focusing on what the mothers think is important, the chance of realising *Samenspel*'s objectives is greater.

The involvement of mothers can be increased, for example, by including an evaluation period in the programme. An evaluation would allow participants' wishes and ambitions to be obtained in a structural way. If necessary and in line with the objectives, the programme could then be adjusted to the actual needs of the specific situation.

To date, *Samenspel* has focused primarily on women. One recommendation would be to conduct research to establish the ways in which fathers can be involved in child-rearing and in the playgroups. Such research would perhaps demonstrate that involving fathers more in *Samenspel* is desirable.

During the study, the impression was created that the mothers who care for only one child cite more pedagogical changes, possibly because they have more time and attention to spend on the upbringing of this child. It also appears that the duration of participation in *Samenspel* has no great influence on the changes indicated by the mothers. A follow-up study could concentrate on these observations, providing insight into possible connections and underlying factors.

The results of the study show that the interviewed mothers attach value to *Samenspel*'s elements of educational support. This can provide a starting point for regular pre-school to try out and perhaps incorporate the elements of *Samenspel* into their own activities – things such as allowing mothers to participate. Another possibility would be to ensure that there's a place where mothers can exchange child-rearing experiences.

In any event, it's clear from the study that actively and constructively supporting mothers – and of course fathers – in the rearing of their children can be very valuable.

APPENDIX I. The questionnaire

1. Before starting the interview

- Introduction to each other.
- Explanation of how the interview will proceed.
- Explanation of what will be done with the data, what the purpose of the research is.
- Talk about the party which will be held when the study is completed.
- Raise issues of anonymity and trustworthiness.
- Emphasise that answers are not correct or incorrect.
- Preferably, the questions should be answered honestly, so that Samenspel can better focus on the participants' desires.
- It's no problem if something is not understood; it will be explained again.
- Take the time to think about the answers; silence is okay.
- Are there needs or wishes to be expressed before the interview begins.

2. Administering the questionnaire

Participation in the playgroups (recruitment)

1 How did you know that there were playgroups?
2 Why did you start going to the playgroups?

Language (language development)

3 In which language do you normally speak to your child?
4 When do you speak Dutch with your child?
5 What do you do to teach your child language?
6 You've named a number of things (such as . . . .) How does your child react when you do these things?
7 What language-related things does your child learn at the playgroups?
8 Has engaging in these language activities at the playgroups given you ideas? Such as?
9 Is it important for you that a play leader is present at the playgroups who speaks . . . . . (participant's language)? Why?
10 Is it important for you that a play leader is present at the playgroups who speaks Dutch? Why?

Doing things together (socio-emotional development)

11 With whom does your child do things, besides yourself?
12 What are the sorts of things that you do with your child?
13 What does it mean for you to do things with your child?
14 In terms of doing things together, are you handling things differently or thinking differently because of the playgroups? In what ways?

Doing things alone (independence development)

15 What things can your child do without your help? (In day-to-day living: housekeeping, personal care, playing, eating/drinking.
16 How do you help your child when he/she tries to do something him/herself?
17 You named . . . . . , how does your child react to this?

18 In terms of letting your child do things alone, are you handling things differently or thinking differently because of the playgroups?

Talking about child-rearing

19 With whom do you talk about child-rearing
20 Why do you talk particularly with these people?
21 What importance do these conversations have for you?
22 What do the playgroups mean to you if you want to talk about child-rearing?

Activities at the playgroups

23 Which activities/things do you enjoy doing at the playgroups?
24 What do you like about them?
25 a) Which activities/things do you find less enjoyable?
b) What don't you like about them?
26 What does your child like about the playgroups?
27 What doesn't your child like about the playgroups?

Changes

28 Has your child changed by going to the playgroups? How has he or she changed?
29 Has anything changed for you? What?
30 What do you think about these changes in your child and in yourself?

***Samenspel* as meeting place and learning place**

31 What do you think about your child meeting other children at the playgroups?
32 What do you think about meeting other women at the playgroups?
33 If you had to explain to another mother what the playgroups are, what would you tell her? Think about the advantages and the disadvantages.
34. What more does your child learn than children who do not go to the playgroups?

Pre-schools and primary school

35 Have you registered your child at pre-school?
36 How did you arrive at this decision?
37 What things does your child learn at the playgroups that he/she will be able to use later in school?
38 What things are said about primary school at the playgroups?
39 Did you already know these things?
40 Would you like to know more about primary schools?

3. Concluding the interview

Do you have any advice for us about how we could make the playgroups (even) better? Think, for example, about the activities.
Is there anything else that you want to ask or say?
What did you think of this conversation? Of the questions?

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APPENDIX II. Overview of *Samenspel* participants

Participating families' details as given by the mothers, as of 1 October 1994

Cultural background

Dutch	2
Turkish	78
Moroccan	33
Antillean (Curaçao)	6
other	4
total	**123**

Family composition

left blank	14
1 parent, 1 child	4
1 parent, 2 children	2
1 parent, 3 children	2
2 parents, 1 child	39
2 parents, 2 children	33
2 parents, 3 children	19
2 parents, more than 3 children	10
total	**123**

Child's gender

left blank	1
boy	77
girl	55
total	**133**

Language spoken

left blank	0
Dutch	2
Turkish	50
Turkish/Dutch	28
Moroccan Arabic	11
Moroccan Arabic/Dutch	6
North Berber	4
North Berber/Dutch	1
North Berber/Moroccan Arabic	7
North Berber/Moroccan Arabic/Dutch	2
South Berber/Moroccan Arabic/Dutch	1
North and SouthBerber/ Moroccan Arabic/Dutch	1
Papiamento/Dutch	4
Papiamento/Dutch/other	2
Papiamento/Spanish	2
Other	2
total	**123**

Child's age

left blank	1
1 – 1½	2
1½ – 2	8
2 – 2½	22
2½ – 3	20
3 – 3½	41
3½ – 4	34
4 – 4½	5
total	**133**

Frequency of participation

First time	109
Often, number of times unknown	3
second participation	10
third participation	1
total	**123**

Began participation

left blank			3
	1992	**1993**	**1994**
January		1	1
February		2	4
March	1	2	1
April			6
May			2
June			3
July			
August			10
September	1	1	36
October		3	23
November		2	13
December			8
total			**123**

Participating families' details as given by the play leaders, as of 1 February 1995

Participation institutions	
Antillean groups	2
Moroccan groups	7
Turkish groups	8
Intercultural groups	1
total groups	**18**

Number of registered mothers by nationality	
Antillean	11
Moroccan	81
Turkish	113
other	3
total	**208**

Number of registeredchildrens by nationality, gender and age

	Antillean		Moroccan		Turkish		other		total	
Age	*boy*	*girl*	*boy*	*girl*	*boy*	*girl*	*boy*	*girl*	*boy*	*girl*
< 2		2	7	5	4	1			11	8
2 – 2½	3	3	16	5	8	8		1	27	17
2½ – 3	1		6	8	15	9		1	22	18
3 – 3½		2	7	6	13	16			20	24
3½ – 4		2	12	15	23	25	1	1	36	43
total	**4**	**9**	**48**	**39**	**63**	**59**	**1**	**3**	**116**	**110**

APPENDIX III. Research group data

Overview of the respondents

Participation as of February 1995	
1 month	2
2 months	1
3 months	3
4 months	4
5 months	9
6 months	7
7 months	1
8 months	1
11 months	2
12 months	2
13 months	2
23 months	1
total	**35**

Language spoken	
Dutch	1
Turkish	11
Turkish/Dutch	7
Moroccan Arabic	4
Moroccan Arabic/Dutch	4
North-South Berber/Moroccan Arabic/Dutch	1
Papiamento/Dutch	2
Papiamento/Dutch/other	2
Papiamento/Spanish	1
English	1
Other/Dutch	1
total	**35**

Age of respondent	
unknown	1
20–24	7
25–29	11
30–34	8
35 and older	8
total	**35**

Cultural background	
Antillean	4
Turkish	18
Moroccan	9
Dutch	1
other	3
total	**35**

Child's gender	
boys	19
girls	23
total	**42**

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The Foundation's central objective is to improve opportunities for young children who live in disadvantaged circumstances. It does this by supporting the development of innovative field-based approaches in early childhood development, and by sharing experiences with as wide an audience as possible in order to influence policy and practice.

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Working Papers in Early Childhood Development form a series of background documents drawn from field experience to present relevant findings and reflections on 'work in progress'. The series therefore acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas.

Some of the papers arise directly out of field work, evaluations and training experiences from the worldwide programme supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Others are contributions which have a particular relevance to that programme. All are aimed at addressing issues relating to the field of early childhood care and development.

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